

October 15, 1981

SUBJECT: Reflections on the U.S. Propaganda Posture

1. When the late Edward R. Murrow was designated by President Kennedy to become Director of the United States Information Agency, Mr. Murrow said that he would accept the appointment with the hope that he would participate in the launching of projects, not only in their crash landings. He was soon disappointed. Successive heads of USIA have not done any better. U.S. information measures react to events - they don't shape them. Policies are seldom if ever formulated with consideration of their public relations impact abroad.

2. There are serious and legitimate questions whether the United States Government can, or even should, attempt to further its foreign policies through the influencing of public opinion by means other than factual presentation of the news. Even during World War II, the United States did not admit having a propaganda agency; it was called the Office of War Information. The Office of Strategic Services (OSS) had a Morale Operations Division which aimed at influencing the populations in Germany and in the occupied areas. The Army alone called the thing by its true name: it had a Psychological Warfare Directorate. With the benefit of 20/20 hindsight, we can say with certainty that our psychological warfare had little to do with winning the war. On the other hand, the concept of America, the land of freedom, of opportunity and of upward mobility, "where the streets are paved with gold", continues to exert enormous magnetic function, has been the ideal of the millions in most parts of the world and this will continue long after we are gone.

3. Only a few of our Presidents in this century enjoyed something like worldwide prestige and popularity, not necessarily to the same degree. I am thinking of Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt and Kennedy. Perhaps also Eisenhower. They all had problems which are not relevant to this discussion, but they were able to project an image which captured peoples' hearts. Public opinion cared little for the details. More recently, however, we have flooded the world with detail, failed to capture emotions and "turned off" or antagonized many, particularly among the better educated.

4. Washington's current preoccupation with Soviet "active measures" is clearly influenced by the recognition that the Soviets have been gaining, and conversely we have been losing, in the continuing international battle for public opinion. I am not suggesting that it is all over; indeed, Washington tends to forget that public opinion is a continuing fluidum. It should also be recognized that we are not talking about a popularity contest. Surely, the United States is more popular than the Soviet Union. There are many millions of Russians, let alone Cubans, who would rather live in the United States; few Americans or Germans or French or Japanese would like to leave their homes to live in Russia. The American Way of Life is the ideal for much of the world. The superiority of the United States in many fields of human endeavor cannot be seriously questioned. Yet it is the communists who have made the big gains since World War Two; it is the Soviet Union which forces a level of defense expenditures threatening the political and socio-economic balance in several Western democracies; it is the European left-wing which is now on the threshold of defeating a major American-sponsored military-political decision, i.e. the modernization of theater nuclear forces in Europe.

5. The most recent shift against our policies in West Germany has started during the Carter Administration and can be fixed in time to the failure of the U.S. Senate to ratify SALT II. The trend was running clearly against us by the time the Reagan Administration settled down to work and has continued unfavorably to our objectives since then.

6. Can the trend be reversed? Yes, but not if we continue to do what we have been doing. We need our own "active measures" instead of complaining about the success of the Soviets. We have to capture and hold public opinion and again identify the United States with positive objectives, with "the pursuit of happiness", with the issue of peace. It is ridiculous that we have permitted ourselves to be maneuvered in the position where only the Soviets and their stooges appear to have a claim on "peace".

7. In July 1981, prior to your return to the United States, we gave you a memorandum in which we suggested the following steps to meet and counter-act the Soviet propaganda challenge in Western Europe and specifically in the German Federal Republic.

a. It would be particularly useful if the U.S. could make some dramatic offer on arms control.

b. Administration spokesmen should eschew public statements of U.S. intentions to gain military superiority over the Soviet Union.

c. Similarly, Administration spokesmen should avoid belligerent rhetoric in addressing East-West issues. A calm, businessliker tone could go far towards realizing European popular support for our policies.

d. Administration spokesmen should publicly speak with one voice.

8. The above still stands as a valid recommendation. Which brings us to the heart of the problem. Effective propaganda is dependent on effective policy-making. Efforts to influence the opponents' state of mind whether called propaganda, covert action or active measures, cannot take the place of a well-conceived, consistent policy; they cannot substitute for policy; they can only supplement policy.

9. Soviet "active measures" are an offensive instrument of Soviet foreign policy. The Soviets may be doing little which our side is not doing or has not tried to do but there is a big difference. The Soviets have been doing more of it, over longer periods of time, have developed powerful infrastructures in different parts of the world and are uninhibited by their own domestic opposition. In sum, they are doing it better and more effectively. Ranting or raving about the alleged immorality of active measures cannot help our cause--indeed, it may further advertise the Soviet competence and our own relative helplessness.

10. While any comparison of respective resource allocation would show a tremendous disparity between Soviet and Western propaganda efforts in favor of the former, that is not the only or even principal answer to our current dilemma. The West and particularly the United States enjoy certain natural advantages, including the standard of living secured by free enterprise and the climate of intellectual freedom. These speak more forcefully and naturally than any contrived propaganda. The answer to the Soviet challenge would seem to lie not so much in an attempt to duplicate the communist

organizational structure and resource allocation, but in a more intelligent and systematic application of our own, considerable strength. This cannot be done without resources--here, too, the principle applies that you cannot get something for nothing--but the necessary resources, the funds that can be spent to good purpose, would be very modest in terms of existing defense or intelligence budgets.

11. A greater difficulty would seem to be in the organizational area. We have no structures comparable to the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union or to the International Information Department of the Central Committee. In the American system we have no such counterparts. Thus on one side we have a continuity of policy and policy support and centralized, institutional connection with and assistance to like-minded persons or organizations abroad while on the American side we have little continuity, or consistency, seemingly little awareness of the psychological aspects of policy implementation and a decentralized, unconcentrated approach to the task.

12. In the United States Government parts of the responsibilities for psychological/political warfare, covert action and other functions comparable to "active measures" are currently vested in the National Security Council Staff, in the Defense Department, in the Central Intelligence Agency, in the Department of State and in the United States Information Agency. Involved further are other components of the White House, OMB, and others. In all cases the senior officials responsible in some degree for "active measures" have a great many other burdens, including policy formulation and the running of their own empires. There is no single official or office with the primary task of planning, coordinating, implementing and monitoring such activities. That is not to say that coordination is totally lacking. There are NSC staff mechanisms through which requirements can be served on the operating agencies and there is some congressional oversight. If there is a strong Secretary of State, as there is now, there will be plenty of requirements but little discussion of their suitability or applicability. There will be little if any objective, comprehensive review of the programs undertaken in response to the high level directives. Money spent will be equated all too readily with success. It is one of the fatal weaknesses of the American system that it seems to be assumed that sporadic ad hoc requirements can be accomplished without a permanent infrastructure. That is simply not the case and

it should be obvious, when considered logically, that it cannot be the case. Yet we seem to lack the long-term goals or the foresight and the patience to develop human resources in this area, whereas we take it for granted and accept it as normal part of our lives that it takes a certain number of years to train a doctor or a banker or an Army Officer. The sad fact is that political action personnel have virtually disappeared from our services abroad and cannot be created by executive fiat in response to sudden requirements and the necessary foreign assets even less so.

13. Conclusion: The improvement of the United States propaganda posture depends in the first instance on the implementation of organizational changes, designed to permit an orderly chain of policy generation and policy implementation. To the extent that the policies need to be supported through covert, non-official or psychological means, the "battle-ground" has to be prepared with the cooperation of existing "infrastructure" assets, such as cooperating journalists, youth organizations, politicians, and so forth. In other words, the psychological climate for favorable reception of policy pronouncements must be created before confronting public opinion with a sudden announcement. The more controversial the latter, the more important is the advance preparation.

This is not the way the United States Government now operates. While the necessary changes would be within the realm of the Executive and could thus be implemented without any legislation, they call for a degree of coordination, cooperation and patience which the existing power structures are likely to resist. Only the President could set the signals for more effective and resourceful approaches in United States propaganda and related activities and then he would have to find an individual of some stature willing to engage himself fully along such lines. Since there are other great and conflicting priorities, I frankly doubt that any significant changes could be undertaken in time to effect the resolution of current issues. Of course, the later we start, the longer it would take to see favorable results. A lead-time of one or two years between decision and implementation would seem to be a highly optimistic minimum.

Page Denied